

A HISTORY OF IRELAND IN 100 OBJECTS, A SELECTION 5TH & 6TH CLASS LESSON PLAN

Tara Torcs c.1200BC



If someone were to offer you a necklace made of anything in the entire world, what would you say?

Wood?

Stone?

Gold?

The people who lived in Tara over 3,000 years ago would have gone for gold. No question about it. Of course, ordinary people never got to wear gold. They were far too busy doing the actual work around the place, like farming and cleaning and cooking. But if they spotted someone wandering around wearing gold, they would certainly have stared. And if they spotted someone wandering around wearing gold torcs, they would have stared a lot. An awful lot.

Torcs are giant rings, just like necklaces or belts and they are made of long bars of twisted gold. Now, that may sound simple enough. You might think it can't be that difficult to twist a bar of gold. However, you have to remember that gold is a 'soft' metal, which means it's possible, but not particularly easy, to bend and twist it into shape and people didn't have fancy machinery in those days.

In fact, the Tara torcs are pretty amazing. If you were to entirely untwist the largest torc and stretch out all the gold along the ground, it would measure 167 cm. That is more than five rulers lined up end to end, which is an awful lot of gold.

Some people, who have studied life in Tara, think that the torcs were not just symbols of great power and importance, but might also have been a sign of some kind of link between the living and the dead. Anyone wearing one of these torcs would have been considered very special and maybe also just a little bit spooky.

So if you happened to be living in Tara over three thousand years ago, and you saw a woman or a man wearing a torc, maybe performing a very important ceremony or greeting some very important guests or walking around in a very important way, there's a good chance that you'd freeze.

Yes, absolutely freeze.

Maybe you'd give them your biggest, brightest smile.

Maybe you'd even wave.

Or maybe you'd think that that person was so spooky and so scary, that you couldn't even look them in the eye and you'd bow your head very low.

Who knows?

But whoever got to wear those torcs, they must have smiled a secret smile whenever they put them on. And they smiled that secret smile because they knew that no matter where they went and what they did, people would stop and stare and take notice.